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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000440

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/WE: LEVIN; EUR:NCE; EMBASSY BUDAPEST PASS IZZO

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TAGS: [VT](#) [HU](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: VATICAN: HUNGARIAN CHURCH-STATE RIFT MERITS ATTENTION

REF: A) BUDAPEST 209; B) BUDAPEST 226; C) MARTIN-IZZO EMAIL 2/3/05

CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, POL, Vatican, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

1. (C) Holy See Country Director for Central Europe Monsignor Michael Banach (protect throughout) acknowledged mild though persistent tensions between the GoH and the Catholic Church, adding that issues relating to the funding of Catholic Schools and differing interpretations of the 1990s agreements between the two sides had created "a situation meriting attention." Banach did not dwell on controversy emanating from PM Gyurcsany's December 18 visit to the Holy See, but implied that Gyurcsany's remarks regarding the Hungarian Church's role in politics and his failure to acknowledge the Pope's welcoming address following the PM's papal audience had been ill-received at the Vatican. Banach was not overly concerned about possible fall-out from the initiative to open the files from the communist era "III/III" intelligence unit, and was pleased to learn of the Hungarians' proposed joint ecumenical statement against human trafficking. End Summary.

Mild Tensions

2. (C) Holy See Country Director for Hungary Monsignor Michael Banach (protect throughout) acknowledged mild but persistent tensions between the GoH and the Catholic Church, and said issues relating to the funding of Catholic schools, the Vatican Treaty, and the Financial Conditions of the Religious and Public Purpose Activity of Churches Act of 1997 (ref b) had created "a situation meriting attention." He asserted that some governmental budget cuts had been "contrary" to these agreements. Initially the Holy See had been encouraged by the formation of a joint commission set up to examine issues related to the agreements. While the Hungarian Catholic Church had appointed top officials to the commission, Banach claimed that the GoH had "demonstrated its lack of desire for true cooperation" by choosing relatively low-level or unprepared members.

PM Ruffles Feathers

3. (C) Banach initially attempted to remain above the fray when recounting PM Gyurcsany's December 18 visit to the Holy See (ref b). But after some discussion, Banach pointed out that in the PM's remarks to the media and in his office's press release following the visit, Gyurcsany had failed to mention the points made in the Pope's welcoming address. Banach implied that Gyurcsany's avoidance of these carefully-chosen remarks on Hungarian-Holy See juridical agreements and Hungary's future contributions to the EU was not well received at the Vatican. The Prime Minister's critical comments on the Hungarian Church's role in politics seem to have been similarly received. Banach noted the negative reaction in the Hungarian press in the aftermath of Gyurcsany's visit and the nuncio's statement referred to in ref (b).

Three Stroke Three

4. (C) According to Banach, the initiative to open the files from the communist era "III/III" intelligence unit (ref b) is only on the edge of the Holy See's radar screen. Banach did not seem familiar with the exact nature of the III/III files, but said that he was hopeful that even if the III/III archives revealed names of clergy members, the public would realize that such revelations were either politically motivated, or more complicated than they seemed on the surface. He admitted that the situation could "blow up" for the Church if particular high-level names did come up, or if there were a rash of clerical entries in the files.

TIP Initiative a Positive Development

15. (C) Banach, who is familiar with Embassy Vatican's various anti-trafficking (TIP) initiatives, was pleased to hear about the Hungarians' proposed ecumenical statement against TIP (ref a) and appreciated receiving a draft copy of the text (ref c). He noted that the Hungarian Bishops' Conference had expressed concern for TIP in the past, at least informally. Coordination between the Conference, other religious organizations, and

governments was a "very positive development" due to Hungary's strategic location between Eastern and Western Europe, he concluded.

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